

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the  
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

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AUGUSTE COMTE.

*Frontispiece to The Open Court.*

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## VERGIL'S CONCEPTION OF FATE.

BY ARTHUR L. KEITH.

THE most casual reader of Vergil's *Aeneid* can scarcely fail to be impressed with the largeness of the part played by the idea of fate or destiny. Without a clear understanding of the poet's conception of fate, much of the real significance of his epic poem will be lost, for his idea of fate is intricately involved with the plot and character and thought. Vergil, as well as other writers, recognized the difficulty inherent in the definition of the idea. The contradiction between the fore-ordained and the freedom of the will may never be explained away. Cicero has told us (*De Div.* II, 8, 9): *anile sane et plenum superstitionis fati nomen ipsum*, "the very name of fate is puerile and full of superstition". The Homeric heroes acknowledged the supremacy of fate, yet played that they were free. And so we of this generation admit the existence of the inevitable laws that govern the universe toward its larger issues and yet pretend to believe that man's will is absolutely free. Vergil, like the rest of us, was confronted by the insoluble difficulties of the situation, and if the lines he draws are not always clear, the fault is not his own.

The idea of fate is prominent in Greek poetry from Homer down through the tragedians. There were formal discussions of the subject with which Vergil may have been familiar, though they probably did not greatly influence his own conception. His treatment of the idea of fate differs from that of Homer as far as day from night. Homer's heroes act as if moved by free-will though the inevitable doom lay always in the background. Vergil's hero is forever under the shadow of destiny and yields im-

plicit obedience to the unseen power. The hereditary doom of Aeschylus's tragedies is far removed from Vergil's idea of fate. In the causes that lead up to the fall of Troy there may be a suggestion that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children but the suggestion is not developed. Indeed, Dido is broken by the fates not because she is the *descendant* of those who have outraged the laws of right but because she is the first queen of a people who were in the distant future to prove Rome's most formidable enemy. Dido's dying curse that entailed sorrow and suffering for later generations of Romans does not enter largely into the story of the Aeneid and even if it did, it differs in important particulars from the fatal curse of Attic tragedy.

We can hardly dismiss Vergil's indebtedness to the Stoic philosophy toward which he inclined in his more mature years. His Aeneas is so characteristically a Stoic that we must believe that the poet accepted somewhat of the Stoic attitude. His ascription of purpose and providence to fate represents an obligation to Stoic philosophers which must be recognized, yet in the working out of his ideas he has achieved a distinct originality. We feel that fundamentally his idea of fate was a development of the experiences through which he had passed, the events which he had witnessed, culminating in the establishment under Augustus of the world-empire. He had seen personal fortunes thrust aside by the onward march of stern events. Born in the village of Andes, near Mantua, he spent his youth in the innocent pleasures of that sheltered nook, but soon he was destined to be swept into the current of the great events of his age. Things which once seemed permanent proved transitory. His father's estate was confiscated and though it was later restored, Vergil learned through experience and observation that the course of events seemed to be determined by a power beyond himself. The civil wars of the past century must have profoundly moved him, susceptible as his poetic temperament was, and it would be strange indeed if he did not share in the general depression of the time. But when the clouds had lifted and Augustus was seen to have ushered in the reign of peace and order and prosperity, a new significance was attached to the power which before had seemed to act blindly and it was recognized that there was an intelligence in the unseen power. If there had been no Augustus, it is easy to see that Vergil's reaction toward fate would have been quite different. He



felt with Horace that Augustus was the supreme gift of the fates to mankind.

This more hopeful conception of fate is somewhat related to Vergil's philosophical attitude toward the development of history. Differing from his contemporary Horace, he did not find his chief interest in the present. His vision extended far into the past as he traced the process by which from humble beginnings Rome had achieved her present greatness, and then this view reached out into the future of the empire to which had been established neither goals of history or seasons. This broad outlook of the poet is responsible in large measure for the idea of destiny as it appears in the *Aeneid*. The importance of the historical element in his conception of fate is suggested by a ready computation. Fate is mentioned more than four times as frequently in the *Aeneid* than it is in the *Bucolics* and the *Georgics*. These pastoral and agricultural poems are relatively independent of the idea of destiny that gives history its real significance. Thus from the poet's reflection on his own experiences, and from his philosophical attitude toward history, we may believe that his conception of fate developed, unaided in any great degree by the thoughts of his predecessors.

Consideration of this idea in Vergil may be limited to the *Aeneid* where we find its greatest development. Five times within the first forty lines we are confronted with the fates. They are directly mentioned on an average once in every seventy-eight lines, if we take the entire poem. But these figures do not give the whole truth. Even when not directly mentioned, the fates are omnipresent. In the background of every event, of all signs and omens, lies fate. Perhaps its universal presence may be regarded as its most outstanding attribute. The various incidents of the last night at Troy are big with fate. We feel that the serpents are directed against Laocoon by the unerring and invisible power. The wooden horse is clearly felt as an instrument of fate. Likewise, we see the guiding hand of destiny as Aeneas overcomes every obstacle in his journey toward the promised land. His adventures with Harpies and Cyclopes, his long dalliance with Dido, his bold defiance of the dangers of the lower world, and the wars he fought in Italy gain significance from the fact that they appear as incidents in the onward march of destiny. Omens and signs and dreams are but the visible indications of the invisible power. The

fire that played about the temples of Iulus is significant that his line is marked by fate. Omens which preceded Aeneas's arrival in Latium indicated that he was the man of destiny. The designs on Aeneas's shield represent the fates of the coming generations and as Aeneas lifts to his shoulders the fame and fates of his descendants we feel that the fates are always as near to their chosen people as the shield is to the hero who bears it.

This omnipresence of the fates is aided by their close association with the gods. This association is so close at times as to indicate that the poet aimed at no exact distinction. In some vague way they seem almost identical. A frequent recurring expression is *fata deum*, the fates of the gods. We also meet *fata Iovis* (4, 614) and *fatis Iunonis* (8, 292). Even when not related thus by the limiting genitive they are often almost as closely connected in other ways. The fates and the gods receive credit equally in many situations.

*dum fata deusque sinebant* (4, 651).

*sat fatis Venerique datum* (9, 135).

*vel quae portenderet ira*

*magna deum vel quae fatorum posceret ordo* (5, 706).

*nec pater omnipotens Troiam nec fata vetabant stare* (8, 398).

*matre dea monstrante viam data fata secutus* (1, 382).

*cur nunc tua quisquam*

*vertere iussa potest aut cur nova condere fata?* (10, 34).

It is not easy to disentangle fates from gods in these passages. Perhaps some of these instances represent Vergil's well known habit of duplication. There is practically no difference between *fata obstant* and *placidasque viri deus obstruit auris*, (4, 440). The poet aims at no nice distinction of responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

There is no lack of situations that point toward the same identification. In the first book Venus reproaches Jupiter for changing his purpose in regard to the Trojans, and Jupiter in replying seems to identify his power with theirs:

*manent immota tuorum*

*fata tibi* (1, 257),

and then a moment later supplements with:

*neque me sententia vertit.* (1, 260).

<sup>1</sup> Such instances as these should aid the interpretation of *qui fata parent, quem poscat Apollo*, (2, 121): "for whom the fates prepare (death), whom Apollo claims". Apparently, with the intention of escaping the co-equality suggested by the association of *fata* with *Apollo*, some editors have wrongly interpreted *fata* as the accusative, in the sense of *death*.



If Jupiter is only the agent carrying out the decrees of the fates, surely the many reproaches here and elsewhere heaped upon him are misplaced.

But in spite of this close relationship instances will be found, as noted later, where the gods attempt to thwart or to delay the fates. Jupiter, however, is an exception. His will and theirs accord entirely. The supreme divinity and the purpose of the fates may not collide. Yet the poet does not always clearly show which power dominates.

Sometimes Jupiter seems to be the author of the fates and to dispose them in his own way. Consider the following passage:

*sic fata deum rex*

*sortitur volvitque vices, is vertitur ordo.* (3, 375).

"Thus the king of the gods allots the fates and fixes the succession of circling events and this order revolves". This passage is not easy to interpret. The fates are not thought of here as persons but as lots to be drawn from an urn. True, Jupiter does not manipulate the urn or its contents in order to obtain a lot to his liking and whatever is "write" on the lot is "writ". There is plenty of room for chance but after all the general situation places Jupiter above the fates on the principle that the one who casts the lot is greater than the lot itself. A similar situation is found in 12, 725, where Jupiter holds the scales which decide the fates of Aeneas and Turnus. Here again he stands in the position of controller, though it must be admitted that after the eternal laws of gravitation or whatever principle is involved has been manifested, he has no choice but to comply. But some element of the willing, disposing power is Jupiter's. Compare 4, 110:

*sed fatis incerta feror, si Jupiter unam*

*esse velit Tyriis urbem Troiaque profectis.*

"I am harassed with uncertainty because of the fates, whether Jupiter wills the Tyrians and Trojans to have one city". This same power is implied in Venus's question:

*Quem das finem, rex magne, laborum,* (1, 241).

and Jupiter's reply:

*Imperium sine fine dedi.* (1, 279).

But on the other hand there are indications of the independence of the fates. Jupiter declares his own impartial attitude and leaves the responsibility to the fates:

*Rex Juppiter omnibus idem*

*Fata viam invenient.* (10, 113).

True, Jupiter in his reply to Venus in the first book, as we have seen above, seems almost to identify his will with that of the fates, yet he reads the secrets of the fates from a scroll which appears to have been independent of himself. The *fates* also have some measure of will-power. This will may be exercised apart from the gods.

They call (*voco*), they allow and forbid (*sino, veto*), they demand (*posco*), they drag to and from (*trahunt retrahuntque*), they conquer (*supero*), they pursue and drive (*urgeo, ago, iacto*), and so on through a large variety of activities they appear as active agents.

It is evident that Vergil did not feel the need of differentiating clearly the functions of the fates and of the gods. The fates allow and forbid and determine, yet *sic placitum* and *dis aliter visum* are used of the gods. Perhaps it is safe to say that generally the idea of the fates in the poet's mind dominates the power of the gods, that the fates represent the eternal laws without author, without beginning or end, the ultimate, impersonal necessity, while the conception of the gods is more intimate, more personal and included within the larger idea of fate. Gods may be persuaded and implored, fate is *inexorabile* and *ineluctabile*. The only hope in the face of an adverse decree of fate is that a later decree of the same fate may counterbalance the effect of an earlier decree:

*fatis contraria fata rependens.* (1, 239).

But notwithstanding their independent volition, the fates are largely impersonal. Their great power and influence issue from abstract principle, not from personality. Parcae, as fates, represent a slightly closer approach to personification. They spin the threads of death for Lausus:

*extremaque Lauso*

*Parcae fila legunt.* (10, 814).

In the fourth Eclogue, 46, the personification is more evident:

*'Talia saecla' suis dixerunt, 'currite' fusis  
concordes stabili fatorum numine Parcae.*

'Hasten, blest ages', the Parcae, harmonious in the immutable power of the fates, said to their spindles'. Fortune also lacks a definite personality. She may threaten (*minor*) and will (*volo*) and persuade (*suadeo*) and begrudge (*invideo*). She is *Fortuna omnipotens*, she is *dura*, but she is involved in no stories, as is

Juno with Venus, or Venus with Apollo. *Fata*, *Parcae*, and *Fortuna* are all associated correlatively with the gods as being of equal responsibility, yet while stories could form around the gods none developed about the fates. To a large extent they remained colorless abstractions though they lost thereby none of their power. *Fatum* was so impersonal that by metonymy it could be used and was often used in Vergil and elsewhere with the meaning of death and destruction, in which form destiny so frequently manifested itself. This is a curious development in the face of the fact that the larger and ultimate issue of fate was, with Vergil at least, beneficent, as we shall see later.

Descriptive terms suggest a personality but they never get beyond vague suggestion. The beneficent aspect is not represented through any adjective but is suggested by the consideration of the ultimate and favorable issue. The adjectives used with *fata* suggest the immediate situation and therefore show the stern and forbidding aspects, as *iniqua*, *acorba*, *crudelia*, while *fortuna* is *dura*, *improba*, *inimica*. These adjectives are the reflex of the poet's feeling in the face of personal misfortunes. He may chide the unseen power as well as the gods who bring discomfiture upon man. Sentimentally he may protest the conduct of the fates while intellectually he accepts.

Fate is inexorable as regards its final destiny. This is true whether it is identified with the gods or considered independent of them. Jupiter's will regularly coincides with that of the fates but other gods and mortals often try to avert their operations but always without avail. The course of fate may be retarded. Juno recognizes that she can only delay:

*Atque immota manet fatis Lavinia coniunx.*

*At trahere, atque moras tantis licet addere rebus.* (7, 314).

Dido in her curse realizes that she can not circumvent the fates so as to keep Aeneas from his destined land, yet she may impose conditions that will render his lot harder. Jupiter and the fates may apparently of their own accord postpone the final fulfilment of destiny's decree:

*nec pater omnipotens Troiam nec fata vetabant*

*stare decemque alios Priamum superesse per annos.* (8, 398).

The fates with Apollo's assistance may find an easy fulfilment of a prophecy not issuing directly from the fates but their own decrees yielded to no entreaties:

*desine fata deum flecti sperare precando.* (6, 376).

The conception of fate as inexorable may have a close connection with the inevitableness of death. We have already observed that the word is the equivalent of death. Every man has his own day, a brief and irreparable time of life there is to all. His own fates call Turnus and he comes to the goal of his allotted life. The day of the Parcae and their hostile power approaches. Fate reflects the certainty and stern unyieldingness of death. In the processes of universal or national life there is a continuing force which the larger fate directs to a happy issue, while the individual must yield to death. From the personal fate one may not escape but he may derive pleasure in the contemplation of the far results of time, as Deiphobus does when he speeds Aeneas on his way:

*i decus, i, nostrum: melioribus utere fatis.* (6, 546).

The relation of the fates to the individual man is stern and inflexible. The righteous man may have a show of volition but it must accord with fate. Fate may drive a willing subject:

*fatis egere volentem.* (8, 133).

Aeneas may seek Italy but back of his quest lies the will of the fates:

*Italian petiit fatis auctoribus.* (10, 67).

The Trojans wandered for many years over the sea driven by the fates:

*Multosque per annos  
errabant acti fatis maria omnia circum.* (1, 31).

But we learn that their will was brought into harmony with the will of the fates:

*consilio hanc omnes animisque volentibus urbem  
adferimur, pulsī regnis.* (7, 216).

Man's will may hasten an approaching doom:

*fatoque urgenti incumbere vellet.* (2, 653).

But on the whole, man's volition is much circumscribed and we are frequently reminded that he is doing something *invitus* and *non sua sponte*. Vergil's actors thereby become passive and not active characters. We find nothing more than a suggestion of the thought that man makes his own destiny. Through omens and signs and oracles and even by a descent to Hades, man's duty is to ascertain the will of the fates and then to bring himself into accord with their behests. Any deviation from the will of the fates brings disaster to the offender, even apart from the question of guilt or innocence. In the case of Dido it is hard to see that

the poet ascribed to her any defect or wrong, but she stands in the way of fate, and the individual must break or fall before the decree of destiny. Vergil knows the story of Laomedon, of Ganymedes, and of Paris but he does not develop the idea that Troy fell because of the errors of the Trojans or of their ancestors. Its fall is rather the travail through which a new Troy may be born.

Fate is not deliberately striving to reward the good or to punish the bad, so far as the individual is concerned. She is interested in larger issues, the issues of the state, and the individual is but an incidental matter. She is not perversely cruel to the individual. She injures him or permits him to be injured only as he obstructs the progress toward the larger, ultimate goal. Vergil's conception of fate in this respect seems to differ materially from that of Shakespeare. In the latter's *Macbeth* the part played by the fates seems to be that of malignant persecution by which Macbeth is driven into sin and then punished for it. No such situations are found in Vergil's *Aeneid*. The Dido episode may come to the mind of the reader but there is a difference. Dido suffers cruelly and without adequate cause so far as guilt is concerned. In her queenly bearing, in her womanly conduct, in her warmly hospitable treatment of the outcast Trojans, there is no trace of sin. The poet's sympathies and our sympathies follow her as they do not and cannot follow Macbeth. Aeneas himself, representing of course the poet's point of view, loves and pities her. He tears himself away from his love only when bidden to do so by the higher powers and in order to fulfill a higher destiny, and love for a woman made no exemption. The gods conspired against Dido and threw the temptation before her without her seeking but there was a great purpose to be fulfilled and that purpose was the founding of a city on seven hills which was in time to rule the world, and that larger purpose justified the sacrifice of individual fortunes, including those of the innocent. Without this larger purpose, Dido might appear in much the same role as Macbeth. Vergil does not think of fate as capricious and perverse. The ultimate purpose, while it may not in every instance be clear, is always present. And differing from Aeschylus, fate is far more concerned with the future than with the past.

If man's volition is thus circumscribed, it follows that his duty is in like manner restricted. By omens and oracles Aeneas learns the will of the higher powers and his duty is to obey. The

gods indicate Italy as the end of his journeys and at great personal cost he accepts their bidding:

*hic amor, haec patria est.* (4, 347).

Their will represents the highest form of love and of patriotism. Again and again we are reminded that the Trojans are fulfilling their duty in following the fates as they are given, cruel and extreme though they are. While the end does not appear and while at times they seem to be leading aimlessly, yet man's duty is to follow with implicit confidence:

*quo fata trahunt retrahuntque sequamur.* (5, 709).

Man's doubts and perplexities spring primarily not from the weighing of right and wrong but from the uncertainty of the will of the fates. Aeneas's fault in his dalliance with Dido arises from the fact that he has delayed the operations of the fates, and when he turns his will to further their will, he is no doubt redeemed in the eyes of the poet. Personal merit there is but it is hardly thought of as apart from the will of the higher powers, and like the attending circumstances, it is more incidental than necessary:

*sed mea me virtus et sancta oracula divom*

*cognatique patres, tua terris didita fama,*

*coniunxisse tibi et fatis egere volentem.* (8, 131).

Yet in this connection we cannot afford to ignore the sixth book. The various elements of this book are often inconsistent and defy rational explanation but it is evident that Vergil intended here a serious representation of some deep convictions on the meaning of life. In the cheerless lot of infants caught away from their mothers' breasts by one dark day and plunged in the nether world, we see the operation of a relentless fate which without apparent purpose, has thrust the unoffending children into hopeless misery. Dido's case is somewhat different. Though more sinned against than sinning, she had been an obstacle in the progress of destiny and had cast away her own life and for these acts may be regarded as suffering the consequences of her faults. Palinurus and Deiphobus have committed no offense adequate for the punishments they suffer. They too have been the victims of circumstances. But in the case of others the poet seems to be trying to adjust punishment and reward to guilt and merit, as if the question was solely one of personal responsibility and not of fate. Again and again he shows the crime that lay back of the punishment. He recites the category of vices without a suspicion that fate is in any way involved. Likewise, virtues receive their



reward as if their holders were free agents and chose to do good apart from all connection with the unseen power:

*hic manus ob patriam pugnando volnera passi,  
 quique sacerdotes casti, dum vita manebat,  
 quique pii vates et Phoebæ digna locuti,  
 inventas aut qui vitam excoluere per artis,  
 quique sui memores aliquos fecere merendo:  
 omnibus his nivea cinguntur tempora vitta.* (6, 660).

The prophetic Anchises can review the fates and fortunes, characters and deeds of coming generations and the course of character and event is inexorably established, yet in much of the sixth book the idea of personal responsibility and freedom of will has dominated strict necessity. This book, which is sometimes called Vergil's masterpiece, is neither consistent within itself or with the remaining eleven. It almost stands as a thing apart from the rest of the work. As the personal interest controls the Dido episode, so in this sixth book Vergil breaking away for a time from the conception of destiny which rules the rest of the poem, seems to anticipate the more modern belief that man carves his own destiny, that there is no such thing as destiny or fate outside of a man's own endeavors. Vergil's inconsistency in this matter need not surprise us. There are few of us who do not shift the proportions of the content of fate and free-will under the influences of some recent experience or mood.

But the dominant element in Vergil's conception of fate is that which concerns itself with the fortunes of imperial Rome, in the nationalistic and patriotic aspects. Rarely, if ever, is the poet completely free from the influence of this idea. From the first to the last we feel ourselves under the spell of an unseen, but purposeful power, guiding men and events to one far off divine event, the consummation of which was becoming increasingly apparent in the establishment of Augustus upon the imperial throne. In all the vicissitudes of Roman history, Vergil, writing under the beneficent reign of Augustus, could now see the hand of an intelligent and foreseeing fate. This conception removes history from the realm of the accidental and brings it into relation with the philosophical thought with which Vergil was familiar. In the choice of his subject and its view-point, aside from other considerations, the poet was no doubt guided by the opportunity thus afforded of showing that the marvelous development of the Roman empire had been the concern of the invisible powers from re-

motest antiquity, for the purposefulness of those powers can be realized better through prophecy than by historical narrative of accomplished facts, though naturally the Roman reader would be assisted in his interpretations by the knowledge of what had actually happened.

The entire *Acneid* is constructed on this fundamental conception. As the pages are turned, whether in prophecy, omen, or event, we find conscious destiny at work. The first sentence places before us the lot of a man exiled by fate from Troy making his way through adversity to a promised land where he might found a city and introduce the gods to Latium, whence are to spring the Latin tribe, the Alban fathers, and the walls of lofty Rome. Hostile Juno and potentially hostile Carthage are immediately introduced but we are soon to see that they cannot do more than delay the progress of destiny beginning with this scion of Trojan blood, for the fates have decreed:

*hinc populum late regem belloque superbum  
venturum excidio Libyae.* (1, 20).

In the midst of dire adversity, the Trojans can see beyond the present and find comfort in their great future:

*tendimus in Latium, sedes ubi fata quietas  
ostendunt; illic fas regna resurgere Troiae.* (1, 205).

In the story of the overthrow of Troy, while the parting of the clouds permits us to see the dread powers responsible for the catastrophe, we may also catch glimpses of the greater city and greater destiny awaiting the exiles. Hector's prophetic spirit is looking forward to this consummation when he entrusts to Aeneas's keeping the sacred emblems and Penates:

*hos cape fatorum comites, his moenia quarre,  
magna pererrato statues quae denique ponto.* (2, 294).

In the circumstance that the fates do not permit Aeneas to die, we see their purpose to use him for some great end. The omens of the tongue of fire marks out Iulus as the founder of a great line. Creusa's ghost points out to Aeneas distant Latium as his goal where he is to find prosperity and a royal bride. In the third book, Apollo's oracle while ambiguous as to the place of their destined empire admits no doubt as to the fact of empire itself:

*Dardanidae duri, quae vos a stirpe parentum  
prima tulit tellus, eadem vos ubere laeto*

*accipiet reduces. Antiquam exquirite matrem.  
hic domus Aeneac cunctis dominabitur oris  
et nati natorum et qui nascentur ab illis. (3, 94).*

The Penates are likewise cognizant of the great future awaiting the Trojans, and promise their assistance:

*nos tumidum sub te permensi classibus aequor  
idem venturos tollemus in astra nepotes  
imperiumque urbi dabimus. tu moenia magnis  
magna para, longumque fugae ne linque laborem. (3, 157).*

The Latin god Faunus is also aware of the distinction due to his people from their approaching union with the Trojans:

*externi venient generi, qui sanguine nostrum  
nomen in astra ferant quorumque a stirpe nepotes  
omnia sub pedibus, qua Sol utrumque recurrens  
aspicit Oceanum, vertique regique videbunt. (7, 98).*

But to pass by the many isolated instances which keep this idea before the reader, we may note three sustained efforts of the poet to develop to its fullest extent the idea of Rome's predestined greatness. The length of these passages shows the importance which the poet attaches to the idea. They are of course all prophetic and have the sanction of divinity. In the first, Jupiter reassures Venus of the future of her people. In the next, the place supplying the mystic element, Anchises shows Aeneas the souls of his great descendants and learns the deeds they are to perform. And lastly, Vulcan with prophetic powers, represents on Aeneas's shield all the race of his descent and the wars fought in order. Space will not allow any lengthy quotation of these elaborate representations but they are obviously the most serious efforts of the poet and he has been careful to give appropriate setting to each. In the first (1, 257-296), from the sacred scrolls of the fates Jupiter reads the destiny of the Trojans. He passes through the almost sacred succession of Lavinium and Alba Longa to Rome. He reveals the story of Romulus and the wolf, than which story there was none more venerable in the eyes of the Romans. The change of Ilus to Iulus is made in order to prepare for Augustus's divine lineage. To these people Jupiter, apparently speaking now in his own right, has given neither goals of history or seasons but he has given power without end:

*his ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono,  
imperium sine fine dedi. (1, 278).*

No words could have appealed more powerfully to Vergil's generation than these. He recites, but without names of actors, the dramatic justice wrought by Rome's conquest of Greece, and then reaches the climax in the forecasting of the birth of Augustus who is to bound the empire by the ocean and his fame by the stars; and yet not the climax after all for the greatest thing is that which Augustus represented, the establishment of the reign of peace:

*aspera tum positis mitescent saecula bellis.* (1, 291).

It was the beneficent purpose of the fates that wars should be only a preparation for the divine event which Vergil's generation was witnessing, and the Roman reader must have thrilled with patriotic pride and religious awe as he saw in retrospect what the fates had been working out through the centuries and realized that he was part of the chosen instrument.

The destined greatness of Rome also dominates the revelation of Anchises to Aeneas in the sixth book. This prophecy gains distinction from its peculiar associations, delivered as it is in the Elysian fields by the spirit of the father of the people. The opening words well express the intent of the passage:

*nunc age, Dardanium prolem quae deinde sequatur  
gloria, qui mancant Italia de gente nepotes,  
inlustris animas nostrumque in nomen ituras  
expediam dictis et te tua fata docebo.* (6, 756).

It is interesting to note how the entire prophecy abounds in such words as *gloria*, *inlustris*, *egregius*, *honore*, *incluta*, *amor patriae*, and phrases of kindred meaning. Fate is cognizant of the long line of Roman heroes, of localities regarded as sacred in Roman thought, of incidents and events hallowed by centuries of tradition. The chronological sequence is violated in order that the first Romulus may be immediately followed by Augustus, the second Romulus, who as in the first book, is the culmination of the line of heroes who even a thousand years before the poet's day was promised for the establishment of the glory of Rome:

*hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis,  
Augustus Caesar, divi genus, aurea condet  
saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arva  
Saturno quondam.* (6, 791).

Already in anticipation of his military prowess remote parts of the earth are trembling with alarm. But again, as in the first

book, the crowning glory does not lie in the achievements of Roman arms but in the establishment of the reign of peace and again the beneficent aspect of destiny appears:

*tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento  
(haec tibi erunt artes) pacique imponere morem,  
parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.* (6, 891).

The remainder of the revelation hardly concerns us here. It is an epilogue suggested by the recent death of the youthful Marcellus, the heir of the throne, and as an aftermath in which the intensely human note predominates it stands in striking contrast to the contemplation of the glories of imperial Rome.

The third and last sustained effort to portray Rome's destined greatness appears in the eighth book and involves the use of the shield which Vulcan made for Aeneas. Vergil of course got the suggestion of this device from Homer but there is the widest possible difference in the application. The designs on Achilles's shield have nothing of the prophetic element and deal almost wholly with peaceful themes and are intensely human. The designs on Aeneas's shield accord well with the poet's conception of a fate concerned with the destiny of a great nation. The personal note is completely lacking. Homer saw no impropriety in representing peaceful subjects on the shield, though it was an instrument of war. The shield may have fit in well with Vergil's purpose to depict the martial splendors of Roman history. Among the scenes represented are the story of Romulus and Remus and their foster-mother, the wolf, the seizure of the Sabine women with the subsequent war and treaty, the horrible punishment meted out to Mettus, the story of Porsenna and Cocles and Cloelia, Manlius surprised by the Gauls, the story of the geese, and the hard lot of Catiline in Tartarus and the happy lot of Cato in Elysium, and finally the culmination of wars and heroes, Augustus in the triumph at Actium. The aftermath of peace of the other two great prophecies is not found here. Perhaps the poet was carried away with the general enthusiasm for the extraordinary event which secured the supremacy of Augustus and assured the stability of Rome, so that for the moment one could think of nothing but the splendid victory. Perhaps also the warlike shield and the warlike occasion render the peace motive inappropriate at this place. Weary as the Romans were with war they still loved to contemplate the wars with which their history was crowded and to believe that an all-powerful fate had de-

creed this prosperous series of battles down to the victory of Actium. As father Aeneas lifts this shield to his shoulders somehow in a very real sense he carries the fame and fates of the coming generations. This association of *jama* with *fata* is more than a happy use of assonance. The poet intends a close connection between the two ideas. The fates were vitally concerned with the fame of their chosen people and to the course of their history, destiny had given unity and significance.

Vergil accomplished something new in the development of his theme by establishing a vital and significant connection between the heroic background which he chose for his poem, and the events leading through the centuries down to and including his own generation. It becomes, in fact, an interpretation of the spirit of his age. And no single motive contributes so largely to the working out of this interpretation as the conception, not original with Vergil, of course, but one to which he first gives adequate expression of fate, the unseen, but purposeful and almighty power, concerned in the greatness of imperial Rome, and through a thousand vicissitudes working itself out into the consummation of the empire under the reign of Augustus. In its ultimate effects it was beneficent but ruthless toward all creatures which obstructed its progress. This conception of a fate concerned in the national fortunes is particularly appropriate for a great national epic, especially for that of Rome. In this circumstance lies the explanation of the popularity enjoyed by the *Aeneid* from the very first and the appeal of the poem was no doubt heightened by the fact that the emphasis was not upon war itself but upon the justice of the war and the peace for which war was a preparation:

*iure omnia bella gente sub Assaraci fato ventura resident.*  
(9, 642).

In this conception of fate we hardly expect to meet the personal note, but it is there as a strong undercurrent, and if the poet has not put humanity first he at least compels its recognition. It was the note of humanity which almost made the poet lose sight of the imperial destiny of Rome as he arouses our sympathies for the unhappy Dido. It was the personal note again when after representing the long line of Roman heroes and achievements, he fastens our thoughts upon the youthful Marcellus. For the human lot there are tears and mortal things touch the heart:

*sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt.* (1, 462).



It may well be that as the poet described the splendor of the kingdom of this world he felt a growing sadness at the doubtful doom of human kind. The unseen power was intelligent and beneficent but something was lacking which the poet fully sensed and for which the world was yearning. It is curious that that need was to be supplied before Vergil's generation had passed away and out from an obscure corner of the Roman empire was to arise the founder of the kingdom not of this world whose dominant note is humanity. As Vergil was once thought to have forecast the dawn of this age, this new and spiritual kingdom may also have borrowed something of Vergil's conception of a persistent destiny leading to the final triumph of humanity.